

## A TOBACCO FORTUNE FOR A CANCER CURE

For nearly half a century, Mary Lasker, who died last week at 93, was America's leading crusader against cancer. Yet much of the money she used to fight the disease came from a product now deemed a cancer cause—the cigarette.

Her fortune first took shape in 1922 when advertising genius Albert Lasker was trying to boost American Tobacco Co. sales.

Get women to smoke," a friend suggested, "and you'll double your market." Lasker hired actresses and opera sopranos to endorse Lucky Strikes. For women worried about extra pounds, he coined the slogan "Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet." Lucky Strike sales zoomed 12 percent in a year.

By the time he met Mary Woodard in 1939, Lasker was one of America's richest men, thanks to Luckies and savvy ads that ushered in orange juice, facial tissue and sanitary napkins. "What do you want most out of

life?" he asked her.

She replied, "To promote research in cancer, tuberculosis and the major diseases." They wed, and in 1942 she persuaded him to retire and devote his time and money to philanthropy, especially medical research, which then had little private funding and almost no federal support.

Albert's 1952 cancer death left Mary with one



'30s ad. Getting women to smoke

goal: a cancer cure. She sold off several paintings—Matisse, Renoirs and Van Goghs—and gave the money to researchers. For

decades, she lobbied to upgrade the National Institutes of Health. Result: NIH's funding soared from \$2.4 million in 1945 to nearly \$11 billion in 1994. Richard Nixon, prodded by Lasker, declared a \$100 million "war on cancer" and vowed a cancer vaccine by 1976. That proved an elusive goal, but research has scored advances against several cancers. And Mary Lasker's counsel remains a laboratory watchword: "If there are no leads, let us make them." □ BY GARY COHEN



Lasker. In the 1940s